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Ambiguities are bound to happen –
The detransitivizing suffix –v- and the animacy criterion
in Modern Eastern Armenian

In Modern Eastern Armenian, transitive verbs can be detransitivized by a) passivization b) anticausativization c) reflexivization and d) reciprocalization. The main morphological means of these detransitivization processes is the multifunctional suffix –*v*-, which is often wrongly labelled "passive marker", which is attached to the transitive verb stem.

Because of this homophonous suffix –*v*- ambiguous sentences and various semantic interpretations may arise, so that it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish passives from reflexives, reciprocals and even anticausatives.

(1)   terew-ner-ě   šarž-v-um   en   k'amu-c'.
       leave-NOMp-the   move-pass/anticaus-Part.Pres.   they-are   wind-ABL
       The leaves are moved by the wind.
       The leaves move in (lit. from) the wind.

(2)   Tarec' mard-ě   buž-v-ec'   č'inakan   deł-er-ov.
       aged   man-NOM-the   heal-pass/refl/anticaus.Aor.3.Sg   Chinese   drugs-INSTp
       The aged man healed himself with Chinese drugs.
       The aged man was healed with Chinese drugs.
       (The aged man recovered with the help of drugs.)

Ambiguity is additionally bound to happen because of the similar syntactic structures of passive and anticausative, both expressing the grammatical subject in the Nominative case and the overtly expressed agent of a passive and the causer of an anticausative in the Ablative.

The reading of Modern Eastern Armenian detransitivized structures seems to be, however, highly dependent on the interaction of three different linguistic criteria: a) the lexicalization of many Armenian v-suffixed verbs b) the semantico-pragmatic context of the sentence and c) the animacy of the "agent" expressed as grammatical subject, as grammatical object of passives or as causer.

Although verb semantics and context are of major importance in disambiguating sentences with –*v*-suffixed verbs, the animacy criterion is linguistically the most conspicuous one:
a) grammatical subjects of reflexives (+animate) from those of passives (-animate)
b) grammatical subjects of endoreflexives (+animate) from those of anticausatives (-animate)
c) grammatical subjects of anticausatives (+animate) from grammatical subjects of passives (-animate)
d) overtly expressed (+animate) agents in passives from (–animate) causers in anticausatives etc.

Modern Eastern Armenian also provides syntactic possibilities to avoid such ambiguities by generating reflexive sentences with reflexive pronouns or reciprocal sentences with reciprocal pronouns, as well as by imposing semantic constraints on the passivization of some semantic verb groups.

In this paper the challenge of a linguistically proper description of the various functions of the detransitivizing –v-suffix of Modern Eastern Armenian will be met. The problem of doublets will be exemplified and investigated in close interrelation with the animacy criterion. Furthermore, I will also take a concise look at both the diachronic development and spread of the – v-suffix in Modern Eastern Armenian and possible similarities with areal neighbours and particularly linguistic "conquerors", i.e. the Russian language.

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